

Cultural Authority in Golden Age Spain

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From the SelectedWorks of Carolyn A Nadeau

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Review

Brownlee, Marina S., & Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, eds. *Cultural Authority in Golden Age Spain*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 325 pp. ISBN 0-8010-4936-5.

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Cultural Authority in Golden Age Spain is a collection of fourteen exciting and thought-provoking articles that successfully provides a framework for reconceptualizing Golden Age culture. The introduction by Marina Brownlee and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht is invaluable as it prepares readers for comprehending the complexity of a given culture's representation of authority, informs readers of the goal of the text-to explore cultural authority and literary continuation in the literary enterprise of Golden Age Spain-and addresses the parallels between our own postmodern claims of continuity and authority and the proximity of the "untamable complexity" (xvi) of the Golden Age.

In the first of three sections, "Questions of Authority," both Edward Friedman's and Mary Malcolm Gaylord's articles are impressive examples of Golden Age scholarship. Truly a pleasure to read, the two are the most challenging of the group and offer articulate, provocative readings of two of Góngora's poems. Friedman focuses on the ideologies of discourse and postulates that Góngora, in rewriting the love story of Galatea and Polyphemus, struggles with Garcilaso, with Carillo, and also with the process itself of decoding and recoding verbal messages. "Góngora," Friedman explains, "reinvents discourse, just as he reinvents story" (63). Polifemo, then, becomes a representation of new poetry defined by his competition with Ads who is Renaissance poetry.

In analyzing "De un caminante enfermo que se enamoró donde fue hospedado," Gaylord asserts that Góngora's elusive lyric voice embodies the problem of language as a vehicle of expression. She, like Friedman, maintains that Góngora takes language to its limits and goes further to suggest that "the route through the twisted path of verse form is the route of and to his poetic persona" (99). In exploring inherited linguistic orders and codes, Góngora bears witness to the fact that we can only communicate through shared language. Gaylord concludes that "the absence of a single voice signals not the absence of voice altogether, but rather the presence of many voices" (102). In illuminating the nature and role of Góngora's elusive lyric subject, Gaylord partakes in his celebration of the mystery of language.

The remaining three articles provide excellent guideposts for postmodern direction for Golden Age literature. Brownlee, for example, illustrates similarities between postmodernism and Baroque cultural currents. Her article explores the use of exempla as "metacritical tool(s) to comment on the deceptive nature of language itself" (110). She also argues that an author like Zayas cannot be categorized simply as realist, exemplar, or

feminist apologist because she is in fact much more complex than any one category would admit. José Regueiro reminds us that Reichenberger's structure of order-disturbed to order-restored does not necessarily reflect social harmonization in the *comedia* and actually points to opportunities to reassess social and historical norms. Lia Schwartz Lerner's article offers a compelling analysis of imitation theory and the appropriation of various treatises including literary, philosophical, and medical in shaping the amorous discourse of the Golden Age.

"Representations of the Self," Paul Julian Smith's article on absent homosexual pretexts and repressive homosocial pressures in Garcilaso's First Eclogue, raises some provocative questions: how does homosocial pressure work to exclude women in writing? What is the relationship between metaphor and metonym in distinguishing between self and other? And finally, how will homographesis continue to contribute to our understanding of cultural authority and literary continuance? Similarly, Robert Ter Horst's essay presents stimulating ideas on the early Spanish novel that merit further exploration: the disturbed relationship between father and son in early Spanish narrative, colonial and imperial figuration in the early Spanish novel, and problems of closure for the novel. But his claim that "Spain is the stepfather or stepmother to the novel in England" (174) is not wholly substantiated. I finished the article with the sense that Ter Horst was enticing his readers with only one part of a more extended argument of a complex literary relationship.

Both Ter Horst's essay and Harry Sieber's article on the relationship between the rise of the picaresque novel and the change in lifestyle at the court of Philip III would be more appropriately placed in the "Historical Contexts" section of the collection as both focus on the historical moment in which a given literary movement came into being. Sieber does an extraordinary job explaining the details of where, when, who, and how *Lazarillo* and other novels were published and convincingly elucidates how the growing preoccupation with status, identity, and conduct was a central reason the picaresque novel became so popular when it did.

Ruth El Saffar, in her usual clarity, recapitulates the losses women suffered in the Renaissance in exchange for the gains men attained. She then turns to *Lazarillo* and Saint Teresa's *Vida* to exemplify the stakes involved in "winning the right to self-definition and therefore survival which mark a deep change in the structure of the psyche in early modern Spain" (189). By inverting the I/Other social construct, the narrators of both works expose the fragility of this dichotomy.

The last section, "Historical Contexts," was for me the most exciting of the collection. All five articles treat the actual ideological shift that affected change in the perception of literature. Whether they deal with the influx of New World experiences or a reconceptualization of spatial or chronic dimensions, each article exposes a fascinating dimension of the ever-changing cultural reality.

Using Don Quixote as an exemplary text, Cascardi discusses at length the transformation from a humanist perspective of literature, which relies on the past to assert itself, to a modernist one, which looks toward other contemporary institutions, and the role that secularization and self-assertion play in this transitional time period. The article brings a fresh perspective to Cervantes's role in the shifting trends of literary continuance.

Both Walter Cohen and Diana de Armas Wilson take on the complex issue of New World influences on Old World culture. Walter Cohen confronts numerous themes-demographic destruction of the Americas, Renaissance and European literature, national critical

discourses on empire, historical responses to imperialism-while addressing the impact of Spanish imperialist discourse on "Renaissance" writing. Diana de Armas Wilson's essay presents an impressive understanding of colonial discourse and criticism that has previously treated the ties between Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and Cervantes. While she never commits to Cervantes definitely knowing Garcilaso's work, she is persuasive in presenting connections that are "teasingly circumstantial" (240). Among other similarities brought to light, she compares the use of cannibalism in the *Comentarios reales* and *Persiles*, and concludes that both writers destabilize the binary opposition established in the discourse of imperialist policies.

The last articles were two of the most intriguing of the book. While treating completely different issues Joan Ramón Resina and Gumbrecht share a common link in that they analyze how concepts of space (former) or time (latter) affect literature. Resina responds to the problem of literary historiography in Cataluña during the sixteenth century and proposes that the reason for the disappearance of its literature is due to the concept of space with which Cataluña identified. While Cataluña saw itself as a "series of open-ended linkages modeled on the feudal structure" (295), Castilla envisioned itself as the center of an ever-widening circle which diffused its language and literature along with other cultural and political elements. Resina relates this principle of discontinuity that accompanies any "gravitational movement into the orbit of the new centers of the universe" (300) with today's sense of nationalism in Europe, reminding his readers that all political formations are but fleeting products of our society.

Gumbrecht appropriately closes the collection with an article on closure, time, and the subjective nature of the two. Drawing on Husserl's notion of time and historicization of time constructions, and Koselleck's notions of symmetry/asymmetry, he argues that the structures of Subjectivity are in tension with the prevalent Christian cosmology and that the fictional biographies of the picaresque reflect this tension as they too "oscillate between closure (as modern tales of individuality) and a desire for continuation (as participating in a medieval kind of cosmology and its time construction)" (314-15).

In closing, these fourteen essays present a forum for key cultural issues from the interweaving of historic and literary models, to the power of language, the status of authorial subject, imperial and colonial ideology, and problems of closure. I must congratulate the editors on their accomplishment of providing Golden Age scholars with what is already becoming a hallmark critical text for understanding sixteenth- and seventeenth century Spanish literature.